

Bill Morgan's SPORTING SCENE

Not to be missed!

THERE is no doubt that this Saturday sees Cheltenham Town Football Club's most important match for two seasons.

The visit of Wycombe Wanderers to Whaddon-road in the first round of the FA Trophy on Saturday offers the Robins the best possible opportunity to win back so many of the spectators lost during the slump of the last two seasons.

During that time the club have experienced an all-time low in team performances, quality of players and morale. Consequently gates have also fallen to an all-time low to mirror the general air of depression at Whaddon-road.

However, all that has now been firmly put in the past. We are told that the financial situation at the club is better than ever resulting in the ability to support the highest players' wage bill in the history of the club.

Last Saturday's victory over Bromsgrove Rovers stretched the Robins unbeaten run to seven games and those who were at the match saw their finest home performance for two seasons.

NEVER BETTER

Certainly I have not seen them play better since the season they were promoted to the Premier Division of the Southern League — and I don't think it is possible for the general confidence and morale of the players to be any higher.

I know that with many lapsed supporters their absence from Whaddon-road could be in some ways justifiably described as a case of 'once bitten — twice shy' but I urge all of you to come back to Whaddon-road to look at the current team and this Saturday would be as good a day as any.

Having said that, it is most unfortunate that the man most responsible for their recent run of success, goalkeeper Dave Latchford is not eligible to play because he played for his previous club Redditch in an earlier qualifying round of the competition.

Latchford's contribution cannot be underestimated. Prior to his arrival the team were conceding goals at an average of almost two per game to give them the worst but one defensive record in the league. In the nine games played since he has been in the side they have conceded only eight goals, and four of those came in one game — the only game they lost.

Coincidentally the last game played before Latchford's arrival was at Bromsgrove, where they were thrashed 5-0, so last Saturday's 3-1 victory over the same team provided a good measure of their improvement.

Arriving with Latchford was Charlie Green, a centre forward whose style of play has yet to fully convince the fans of his value to the team, especially after missing two simple chances to score against local rivals Gloucester City in the Boxing Day goal-less draw!

Another player who has only recently begun to be appreciated by the fans is Norman Pemberton, whose first half performance last Saturday was described to me by manager Allan Grundy as "one of the best 45 minutes I have ever seen from any player."

Certainly it was a courageous performance. Throughout the game he was being given the firmest of close attentions by the Bromsgrove defence, resulting in him having to leave the field ten minutes before the end following a particularly heavy tackle.

But for me the most consistent player throughout the season so far has been midfielder Alan Ollis. Signed from Luton Town during the summer, his steadily improving performances have suggested that he should be playing in a much higher grade of football. Together with Graham Mackenzie, they must be the finest pair of passers of the ball anywhere in the Southern League.

DRESSING ROOM

Saturday's cup-tie will obviously prove a difficult fixture and the Robins will especially miss the influence of Dave Latchford. All this week during training sessions the former Birmingham City man will be working with young goalkeeper Tim Harris, imparting as much knowledge and experience as possible. No doubt on match day he will be an important dressing room influence, both before the match and at half-time.

Wycombe are currently challenging at the

top of the Berger Isthmian League and are reputed to be one of the strongest non-league sides in the country. So for the first time in a couple of seasons we are provided at Whaddon-road a match to savour. Let's hope it gets the support it deserves.

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I am not the world's greatest fan of televised soccer. I feel the game has lost a fair few spectators in the Football League, not so much due to a surfeit of televised soccer but to the manner in which it is presented.

Quite the worst presented soccer programme I have seen on the television is the current Saturday night offering from ATV — and this programme reached an all-time low last Saturday night.

We had just seen highlights from the match between Leeds United and Coventry City, in which the Coventry full-back Danny Thomas had been sent off by top referee Pat Partridge. The player had committed two bad fouls, the first of which rightly earned him a booking and the second left the referee no alternative but to send him off.

The second foul was in the 'professional foul' category, where an attacker has a clear run on goal only to find himself being fouled deliberately to prevent the scoring chance. And to any impartial viewer there was no question that the referee was completely right.

Yet we heard Gary Newbon trying to defend the player by suggesting that the referee was being harsh in his treatment and that the fouls were not bad!!

Misinformed and irresponsible television reporting of this kind does little good for the game of soccer. It lessens the credibility of the players, it undermines the authority of the referee and, if the television company cannot report a soccer match in an unbiased manner it should not be allowed to report soccer at all.